7.0 Alternatives

The following discussion considers alternatives to implementation of the Project. The discussion examines the potential environmental impacts resulting from each alternative. Through comparison of these alternatives to the project, the relative advantage(s) of each can be weighed and analyzed.

The CEQA Guidelines require that a range of alternatives be addressed, "governed by a rule of reason." Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR, "describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project, but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives."

The CEQA Guidelines also state that the discussion of alternatives must focus on options capable of either eliminating any significant environmental effects of the project or reducing them to a less than significant level, while achieving most of the major project objectives. According to the analysis presented in the prior sections, adoption of the Project will result in unavoidable significant impacts with regard to the following issue areas:

Air Quality: Long-term PM_{10} emissions
Noise: Long-term roadway and freeway noise
Public Services – Libraries: Adequate facilities and volumes
Transportation/Traffic: Intersection, roadway linkage and freeway impacts

In addition to these significant unavoidable impacts, the analysis presented in the prior sections identified significant impacts related to the following issue areas, all of which can be mitigated below a level of significance:

Geology/Soils: Erosion impacts
Hydrology/Water Quality: Compliance with NPDES requirements
Land Use and Planning: Conflicts with redevelopment plans
Public Services: Police and fire/emergency services

Project alternatives have been selected on the basis of their capability of either eliminating significant environmental effects of the Project or reducing them to a less than significant level, while at the same time seeking to fulfill most Project Objectives. (Project Objectives are listed in Section 3.0, Project Description.)

Throughout the course of Project Planning and environmental review, numerous possible alternatives were considered, as discussed below. The following three Project alternatives were selected for further consideration here:

Alternative 1: No Project
Alternative 2: 25 Percent Reduction
Alternative 3: Concentration of New Growth along "L" Corridor

The discussion in this section provides:

- A discussion of alternatives considered but rejected
- A description of alternatives considered in greater depth
- An analysis of whether each alternative meets most of the basic objectives of the proposed project
- A comparative analysis of the alternatives under consideration and the proposed Project. The focus of this analysis is to determine if alternatives are capable of eliminating or reducing the significant environmental effects of the project to a less than significant level while meeting Project objectives.

Alternatives Rejected from Consideration

Alternative Location

The CEQA Guidelines recommend considering an alternative location to reduce potential impacts of a proposed project. All components comprising the proposed Project are specific to the Planning Area's geographic and jurisdictional context. Adoption of any of the Project components at an alternative location is not feasible and could not achieve Project Objectives. No alternative location can thus be considered.

Increased Development within Arlington Heights Greenbelt

The Arlington Heights Greenbelt is home to Victoria Avenue, a miles-long scenic drive and proposed linear park, as well as the California Citrus State Historic Park. A key Project Objective is to preserve and enhance the character of the area with the Agricultural/Rural Residential land use designation and complementary policies. This designation permits residential development at one dwelling unit per five acres. Because the greenbelt area is in relatively close proximity to higher intensity urban uses and infrastructure, a land use alternative permitting higher density residential development of portions of the Arlington Heights Greenbelt was initially considered.

Higher density development in these several thousand acres would potentially provide housing opportunities equal to or greater than those called for elsewhere in the General Plan, potentially relieving localized air quality and traffic intersection impacts north of SR-91. However, such an alternative would introduce additional new significant and adverse impacts, including but not limited to the loss of agricultural land, loss of cultural and historic resources, increased stormwater runoff and conflicts with voter-approved land use measures (Proposition R and Measure C). Additionally, this alternative would likely create air quality and traffic impacts comparable to or in excess of those of the Project. Therefore, this alternative was rejected from further consideration.

Major Surface Transportation Improvements

Transportation analysis indicated significant and unavoidable impacts to selected intersections and roadway linkages, as well as to all of the freeway segments traversing the Planning Area.

The Project, through the proposed Master Plan of Roadways within the Circulation and Community Mobility Element, includes a number of intersection and roadway improvements to City streets. (Freeway improvements are outside the City's jurisdiction and were thus not contemplated further.) All such improvements deemed reasonably foreseeable and fundable were included in the Circulation and Community Mobility Element. Additional roadway widenings and intersection improvements were not considered due to concerns about cost, localized environmental issues (for example, river and arroyo crossings), and concerns about inducing regional cut-through trips by widening the roadways, ultimately worsening traffic at additional locations. As such, alternatives examining surface transportation improvements beyond those included in the Circulation and Community Mobility Element were not considered.

No Extension of Overlook Parkway

The Project includes connecting the two ends of Overlook Parkway following construction of a new route to the 91 freeway westerly of Washington Street. The route between Washington Avenue and SR-91 is to be determined following a specific routing study. No matter the final configuration, the extension will require a bridge over an existing arroyo east of Washington. Although the Project proposes this extension in concept, no detailed crossing is currently proposed. At the time actual crossing plans are prepared, a CEQA review will be constructed to assess the crossing's potential environmental impacts. Notably, the Overlook Parkway connection was included on the Circulation Element of the 1992 General Plan but was never constructed.

Traffic analysis within this EIR examined a conceptual crossing as a two-lane roadway (one lane in each direction) within a 110-foot right-of-way. Conceptual traffic analysis indicated that following development of an Overlook Parkway crossing and construction of different linkages to the 91 Freeway, traffic levels at intersections and nearby linkages would increase but not above a level of significance. Further, completion of the Overlook crossing was found to modestly improve traffic conditions at locations along Alessandro Boulevard and Arlington and Central Avenues. Therefore, an alternative that removes the extension of Overlook Parkway would worsen identified significant impacts of the Project. As this alternative would worsen rather than lessen identified Project impacts, it was rejected from further consideration.

Completion of Central Avenue

Completing Central Avenue (between its end points at Alessandro and Chicago Avenues) was initially considered as a General Plan circulation alternative to relieve conditions at the Arlington/Alessandro/Chicago intersection. However, the analysis found that roadway and intersection improvements could improve future level of service at this intersection to

acceptable levels (See Table 5.15-6 within the Transportation/Traffic section of this EIR). The completion of Central Avenue is thus not needed to reduce impacts at this intersection. Moreover, exploratory traffic analysis indicated that the completion of Central Avenue would increase Central Avenue volumes to a degree that would create new unacceptable intersections and roadway linkages in the vicinity. For these reasons, the completion of Central Avenue was excluded from further consideration.

7.1 No Project Alternative

This alternative is analyzed within this EIR as required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e). According to Section 15126.6(e)(2) of the CEQA Guidelines, the "no project" analysis shall discuss, " . . . what is reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services."

Description of Alternative

The No Project Alternative assumes that all components of the Project – the updates to the General Plan, Zoning Code and Subdivision Code, as well as the Design Guidelines and Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan – would not be adopted. Instead, the No Project Alternative compares environmental impacts associated with development of the Planning Area per the existing General Plan, Zoning Code and Subdivision Codes. Further, neither the proposed Design Guidelines nor the Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan would be adopted.

A key innovation of the proposed Project involves land use changes in about two dozen focus areas. Many of these focus areas are located along Magnolia and University Avenues and are planned for mixed-use development. Although the existing General Plan included mixed-use land use designations, the application of these designations was quite limited. In addition, the existing Zoning Code does not include corresponding mixed-use zoning classifications. As such, the likelihood of new mixed use development is much lower under the existing General Plan than under the proposed Project. As a result, new development pursuant to the existing General Plan would be somewhat more broadly diffused throughout the Planning Area, whereas the Project seeks some concentration of new development along already urbanized major travel corridors.

Environmental Effects Relative to Areas of Significant and/or Unavoidable Impacts

Traffic

Continued implementation of the existing General Plan, Zoning Code and Subdivision Code would result in a similar level of development and population growth as the proposed Project, although the proposed Project would concentrate this development along already urbanized major travel corridors. The No Project alternative would not yield such concentration.

Existing City policies do not facilitate mixed-use development as effectively as the proposed Project. For example, the Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan will provide detailed guidance development along this corridor, where a significant portion of new mixed-use development is proposed. Notably, mixed-use development will contribute fewer vehicle trips relative to developments along the urban periphery. Further, intersection and roadway improvements included in the proposed Project will lead to measurable improvements at key locations. Moreover, the No Project Alternative would not include policies designed to minimize cut-through traffic intrusion into residential neighborhoods. In all, the No Project alternative would be expected to have similar or greater traffic impacts relative to the proposed Project.

Air Quality

Air pollutant emissions are most closely tied to traffic volumes, but are also related to construction activity. Under the No Project alternative, development would continue in existing patterns, with higher-intensity urban development more broadly diffused throughout the Planning Area than with the Project, which calls for additional infill development on underutilized parcels along major travel corridors, thus reducing the number and length of vehicle trips. However, analysis indicates that anticipated improvements in vehicle emissions are likely over the long term that will provide dramatic reductions in daily emissions of criteria pollutants, with the notable exception of PM_{10}. The No Project Alternative would thus be expected to have similar or greater air quality impacts to the proposed Project.

Noise

As with air quality, noise impacts are closely tied to surface traffic volumes, but are also dependent upon air traffic patterns and, significantly, proposed land uses. Noise forecasts for roadways, freeways, railways and air traffic indicate that larger portions of the Planning Area will in the future be subject to noise levels that may not be acceptable for certain types of development. However, roughly the same increases in freeway, railway and air traffic – and associated noise – will occur without the proposed Project, as these are only tangentially connected to increases in Planning Area population growth. The No Project alternative does not take these noise increases into account and as such, could result in the development of land uses incompatible with localized ambient noise levels.

Library Services

Section 5.13 of the EIR indicates that existing library facilities and services do not meet City standards and that the addition of planned library facilities will not achieve City-established library standards. As such, the No Project alternative would have similar library service impacts relative as the proposed Project.

Other Public Services

Development consistent with the No Project alternative would lead to similar population increases and thus similar Public Service impacts relative to the proposed Project.

Geology/Soils

The Project includes an updated City-wide geotechnical study and identifies places within the Planning Area susceptible to seismic and geologic hazards. The No Project Alternative would continue to utilize information from previous geotechnical studies. The Project thus provides a somewhat greater level of protection from potential geologic and seismic impacts.

Hydrology/Water Quality

The No Project Alternative would not institute a number of Project policies related to the elimination and reduction of storm water runoff, improvements to the Santa Ana River watershed, and protection of groundwater supplies.

Land Use and Planning

The No Project Alternative would not implement the proposed General Plan nor the updated Zoning and Subdivision Codes. Notably, the No Project Alternative would not result in any conflicts with redevelopment plans, whereas under the proposed General Plan, several redevelopment plans will need to be amended for consistency purposes. However, this is considered a relatively minor advantage, in that State law (Health and Safety Code Section 33331) requires that redevelopment plans be consistent with a community's adopted General Plan.

The existing General Plan includes two mixed use designations (residential and office) but does not have corresponding zoning designations. The proposed Project provides a higher degree of coordination between the General Plan and the Zoning Code.

Notably, the No Project Alternative would lead to greater conflicts with such regional plans as the Riverside County General Plan (RCIP) and the Western Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan. The proposed Project includes measures to ensure greater consistency with these plans; the No Project alternative would result in land use planning conflicts.

Other Environmental Effects

Aesthetics

The proposed Project includes citywide Design and Sign Guidelines that are intended to improve the visual quality of all new development. Further, the Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan will provide detailed site planning guidance for development along the Magnolia Avenue corridor; such guidance is intended in part to improve the visual quality of the corridor. Under the No Project Alternative, neither the Design Guidelines nor the Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan would be in effect. As such, the No Project alternative would not achieve the aesthetic improvements to the degree associated with the proposed Project.

Biological Resources

Under the No Project Alternative, habitat-protective General Plan designations would not be implemented, potentially causing conflict with the Western Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Program (MSHCP) and limiting the ability of the City to work with the County to ensure protection of dedicated wildlife corridors. The proposed Project, however, has been designed to complement and implement the MSHCP. Therefore, the No Project Alternative would potentially introduce new impacts to biological resources.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

The No Project Alternative result in the same careful land use planning within the impact zones of Riverside Municipal Airport and March Air Reserve Base/Inland Cargo Port. As such, the No Project Alternative would have potentially greater impacts relative to hazards.

Population and Housing

Under the No Project alternative, development pursuant to the existing General Plan would continue. The existing General Plan anticipated a population of 285,000 people within the City's then-limits by 2010. In 2004, SCAG projected that the City's population (excluding any sphere areas) would be 286,935 and would rise to 307,847 by 2010. However, maximum buildout capacity of the existing General Plan (with no specific associated date) was estimated at over 488,000 people over that plan's planning area.[1] Both the proposed Project and the No Project alternative would enable development consistent with regional growth forecasts.

Recreation

In 2003, the City adopted a Park and Recreation Master Plan, whose recommendations are incorporated into the proposed Project. It is assumed that the goals and policies of the Master Plan will be implemented with or without adoption of the proposed Project. As such, impacts to recreational resources will be generally the same as those under the proposed Project.

[1] DEIR for the Riverside General Plan, September 1991.

Other Issue Areas

The No Project Alternative would have similar impacts to the proposed Project in the areas of Agricultural Resources, Cultural Resources, Mineral Resources and Utilities.

In 2002, the City adopted a Historic Preservation Element separate from the Project. The Project incorporates but does not change the Historic Preservation Element. Therefore, impacts under the No Project Alternative would be similar to those of the Project.

The No Project alternative would have a similar impact upon agricultural resources as would the Project, as both the existing General Plan and Zoning Code provide for appropriate designations and protections for agricultural areas in the City.

Relationship to Project Objectives

The No Project Alternative would fail to meet most of the most critical Project Objectives, including implementation of smart growth principles, increased infill and mixed-use development and reduced cut-through traffic in residential neighborhoods. The No Project alternative would not achieve the goal of greater development on underutilized parcels along travel corridors but would instead foster perpetuation of existing growth patterns, including increased growth along the urban periphery.

Conclusion

Development under the No Project Alternative would not avoid the significant unavoidable impacts of the proposed Project and would not achieve most of the Project Objectives. Moreover, the No Project alternative would have additional potentially significant impacts in the areas of noise, aesthetics, biological resources, geology/soils and land use planning.

7.2 25 Percent Reduction Alternative

This alternative is analyzed within this EIR as a means of reducing environmental impacts of the proposed Project by reducing development capacity within the Planning Area.

Description of Alternative

This alternative would impose a 25 percent reduction citywide in the maximum allowable densities of all residential land uses and the maximum intensities of all commercial, industrial, office and public facilities land uses. All uses within the Downtown Specific Plan area would also be reduced by 25 percent. The Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan would be consistent with the proposed reductions. Zoning designations in the updated Zoning Code would be altered so that the maximum intensities/densities of the zoning classifications would correspond to the General Plan land use designations. There would be no change to the Subdivision Code update nor the Design Guidelines as proposed.

Environmental Effects

Reduced allowable densities and intensities would generate slightly lower vehicle trips compared to the proposed Project. This reduction could reduce identified traffic impacts on roadways, freeways and at one intersection, and lead to somewhat lower air quality and noise impacts. However, given strong regional growth forecasts for Western Riverside County, the imposition by the City of Riverside of such a strict growth limitation would most likely lead to increased development pressure in surrounding and nearby communities, including within sphere areas currently controlled by Riverside County, and possibly as far east as the cities of Beaumont and Banning and south to the cities of Perris and Hemet. With most regional freeways passing through or near the City, increased growth east and south of the City will still yield significant and adverse traffic, air quality and noise impacts within the Planning Area.

Indeed, a major tenet of the proposed Project is to institute smart growth principles in which increased in-town densities and intensities will decrease demand for growth on the urban periphery. The proposed Project seeks to aggressively improve the City's jobs-housing balance so that residents will have greater options to work within the City of Riverside rather than endure long commutes west to Los Angeles and Orange counties. Proposed infill development will make more efficient use of land and infrastructure and will require comparatively fewer vehicle trips and vehicle miles than comparably sized development located on "greenfields" on the urban edge.

The 25 Percent Reduction Alternative would, however, reduce impacts on all public services, recreation facilities, and public utilities. Allowing less residential and non-residential development would lead to decreased demand for these services, facilities and utilities both relative to the Project and to the No Project Alternative. This alternative could also reduce hydrological impacts, in that a reduction in maximum allowable density/intensity could lead to reductions in impervious coverage and increased area available for groundwater recharge.

However, this alternative would lead to potentially complex land use and planning conflicts. Many parcels in the City are currently developed at the maximum allowable density/intensity. An across-the-board reduction in maximum allowable density would create non-conformities on any lot developed at or within 25 percent of the maximum allowable level.

This alternative would have comparable impacts related to aesthetics, agriculture, cultural resources, geology, hazards, and mineral resources.

Ability to Achieve Project Objectives

The 25 Percent Reduction alternative would achieve several of the Project Objectives, including all of those associated with the Subdivision Code update and the Citywide Design Guidelines. However, this alternative would be unlikely to achieve some of the most critical objectives of the entire Project. Specifically, this alternative would make it more difficult to achieve the infill/smart growth objectives of the Project. The lowering of allowable intensities could slacken development interest in the community. Allowing for higher

density development is understood to be a key factor associated with successfully achieving infill development. If allowable development capacity is depressed to a point where it is comparable with levels allowable on the urban fringe, development is more likely to occur on the urban fringe. As such, the alternative would likely lead to greater urban sprawl in western Riverside County.

Conclusion

Development consistent with the 25 Percent Reduction Alternative would be unlikely to lessen the significant unavoidable impacts relative to traffic, air quality and noise that are associated with the proposed Project. This alternative would reduce identified significant impacts to library services and would lead to reduced demands for public utilities, other public services and recreational facilities. However, this alternative would fail to meet the most critical Project Objectives related to infill development, reduction of urban sprawl and other related smart growth principles.

7.3 Increased Mixed Use Along "L" Corridor

Description of Alternative

This alternative is analyzed within this EIR as a means of reducing environmental impacts of the proposed Project by seeking to increase allowable levels of mixed use development along the so-called "L" corridor of Magnolia Avenue and University Avenue. While the proposed Project itself seeks to place a significant amount of new development along this corridor by introducing enabling land use and zoning tools to do so, this Alternative would increase the allowable density/intensity of mixed use development along the corridor by a factor of 25 percent over the levels permitted by the proposed Project. The alternative would permit comparable proportions of non-residential and residential development relative to the proposed Project. This alternative involves changes primarily to the General Plan, Zoning Code and Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan; the Design Guidelines would not change under this alternative.

Comparison of Environmental Impacts to Proposed Project

Development consistent with the alternative would, at buildout, result in increased development along the "L" corridor relative to the proposed Project. In the short term, the significant environmental impacts of this alternative could be equal to or greater than those of the proposed Project. The alternative could result in greater residential and commercial development of the corridor, which could increase traffic levels relative to the proposed Project, as well as create additional air quality impacts and generate noise levels comparable to or greater than the proposed Project. The increased population would also contribute to additional impacts on library services.

In the longer term, however, the higher levels of allowable development could have the seemingly counterintuitive result of decreased levels in several of these impact categories.

More dense/intense mixed use developments would put more people closer to opportunities to shop and work, potentially decreasing traffic volumes as more people walk or use readily available transit service. More intensive development of the corridor would also strengthen the viability of transit along the corridor, as more users would live or work in close proximity to a bus line. Over time, increased demand and use of transit would lead to additional transit service, which could draw new users. Further, greater mixed use development would have stronger potential to increase bike and pedestrian usage as an alternative to vehicular trips.

These potentialities of higher intensity/density mixed use development cannot be modeled or predicted precisely. Traffic modeling techniques tend to assume traffic projections based on land use without great sensitivity to surrounding areas. Most modeling techniques assume that a project will consist of auto-oriented development, basing trip generation rates on averages of rates observed elsewhere. Adjustments can be made to a model to factor in greater usage of transit, walking, biking and other alternative transportation; such adjustments cannot be realistically effectuated, however, until development reaches a critical mass. For these reasons, one would have to assume that increased levels of mixed use development along the "L" corridor would lead to increased population, traffic, air quality and noise impacts relative to the proposed Project.

The alternative would have comparable aesthetics, agricultural, biological resources, cultural resources, hydrology and mineral resources impacts. Increased development within the mixed-use areas would increase impacts relative to public services, utilities and recreational resources.

Ability to Achieve Project Objectives

This alternative would achieve all of the Project Objectives as well as if not more effectively than the proposed Project. The alternative is consistent with smart growth principles; increasing allowable development levels in the "L" corridor could be a strong incentive to the development community to undertake infill and mixed-use developments. The risks of such development compared to single-use, greenfield development are perceived to be high; many in the development community posit that higher allowable intensities/densities are necessary to offset potential risk.

Conclusion

The alternative would most likely result in traffic, air quality and noise impacts similar to or greater than those of the proposed Project. Impacts to public services and recreational resources would be equal to or greater than those related to the proposed Project.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Based on the above analysis, the proposed Project is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. The No Project Alternative would have several of the same significant unavoidable impacts as the proposed Project and would introduce several new significant

impacts related to aesthetics, biological resources and geology/soils. Further, the No Project Alternative would fail to meet most of the Project Objectives.

The ability of the 25 percent reduction alternative to address significant unavoidable traffic, air quality and noise impacts is uncertain. Growth pressure in western Riverside County is strong; a development curtailment in Riverside would likely lead to increased pressure for development south and east of the Planning Area, which would use roadways and freeways traversing the City. This alternative would, however, result in reduced environmental impacts in some areas such as hydrological impacts and public services. This alternative would fail to meet many critical Project Objectives.

The increased mixed use alternative has the potential for long-term reduction of some of the significant unavoidable impact areas, but these impact reductions cannot be reliably predicted. As such, comparable or increased traffic, air quality and noise impacts must be assumed. However, this alternative would successfully achieve all Project Objectives.

The proposed Project is thus the Environmentally Preferred Alternative in that it results in the lowest level of significant unavoidable impacts and best achieves the Project Objectives relative to the other alternatives considered.